

The Library Assistant :

The Official Journal of the Library Assistants' Association.

No. 183.

APRIL, 1913.

Published Monthly.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS.

APRIL GENERAL MEETING.

The next Monthly Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 9th April, at 7.30 p.m., at the **Southwark Central Public Library and Cuming Museum, 155-157, Walworth Road, S.E.**, when the two following papers will be read:—

"SOME POINTS IN THE UPKEEP OF LIBRARY BUILDINGS." By **W. G. Hawkins**, Fulham Public Libraries.

"PRACTICAL LIGHTING PROBLEMS." By **H. G. Steele**, Leyton Public Libraries.

The Walworth Road is easily accessible from all parts of London, and the Council especially hopes there will be a good attendance of members and friends from the Libraries south of the Thames. The occasion is one full of interest: not only will there be a well-equipped and up-to-date library to be seen, but also one of the best and most instructive of local museums. The papers, too, are of an eminently practical nature, dealing with an aspect of librarianship usually overlooked, and in connection with which knowledge only comes after experience generally painfully gained. It may be well to repeat that the Council welcomes unreservedly *all workers in libraries* to these meetings, and no assistant need absent him or her self from any event likely to prove of interest, on the score of non-membership.

SOUTH COAST BRANCH.

The next meeting will be held at the Worthing Public Library on Wednesday, April 16th. By kind invitation of Miss Frost (Librarian of Worthing) tea will be served at Mitchell's Restaurant (opposite the Library), at 5 p.m.

The meeting will take place at the Library, at 6.30 p.m. Mr. Alderman J. G. Denton, Chairman, Worthing Public Library Committee, has kindly consented to preside, and the following papers will be read, followed by discussions:—

"Village Libraries." By Miss F. M. Jefferson (Bromley Public Library, formerly of Brighton).

"Prints in Public Libraries." By A. Webb (Brighton Public Library).

It is hoped that as many members as possible will make an effort to attend, and a cordial invitation is extended to our London friends and others who may wish to be present.

A convenient train from Brighton is 3.6 p.m., by which cheap tickets are issued at the reduced rate of 1s. 2d. return, obtainable at the Booking Office, Brighton Central Station.

A. CECIL PIPER, *Hon. Secretary.*

MIDLAND BRANCH.

The next meeting of the Midland Branch will be held at Walsall on Wednesday, April 9th. Mr. Alfred Morgan, Librarian of Walsall, has kindly arranged an attractive programme, including a Visit to a Saddlery Factory and inspection of the Town Hall. Members will be entertained to tea. Mr. Morgan will deliver an address on "THE WALSALL AND STAFFORDSHIRE COLLECTION IN THE WALSALL LIBRARY," and Mr. H. Grindle, Chairman of the Branch, will give his Presidential Address.

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT.

The Annual Open Meeting of the Branch will be held at Leamington on Thursday, May 29th, and a cordial invitation to attend is extended to all members of the Association. Mr. W. Ewart Owen, Librarian of Leamington, is arranging a splendid programme, details of which will be given later.

EDITORIAL.

Things germane.—The deliberations of certain London Borough Councils have had somewhat of a more than passing interest of late to us. The discussions chiefly on matters of salary, if acrimonious, have afforded instructive and conclusive proof, recent improvements notwithstanding, that much spade work yet remains to be done in the matter of educating the public *and* the powers that be, to a due appreciation of all that Librarianship is and means. In more than one case the question of salaries has been discussed in a spirit which we deeply deplore. The application of such terms as "labourers," "charwomen" and "blind alley occupations" as indicative of, or as alternatives to, public library work and activity, is distinctly unfortunate, and suggests the application of trade union methods of reasoning, and a conception of the status of the trained assistant from which we totally disassociate ourselves. That the salaries of many public library assistants are a disgrace to twentieth century England is unfortunately only too true, and the *Daily Citizen*

has recently expressed some very pertinent remarks on the subject, as may be gathered when such terms are used as, "sweated librarians" and "the cruel effect of the penny rate system." It is hardly conceivable that that which we frequently unconsciously satirise as "these enlightened times" should witness the anomaly of one department of the municipal service shackled to a rate deemed sufficient fifty years ago, and it has always been a mystery, that while other municipal departments fix the rate according to requirements, the reverse operates in the public library service. All of which reminds us that the progress of the Public Libraries Bill now before Parliament, which has passed its first reading, will be anxiously watched by the trained assistant with intelligent anticipation in contrast with the assistant who is satisfied to leave his fate in the lap of the gods. It is an illuminating thought that few are born to librarianship, the majority assimilate librarianship with varying degrees of success, but it is the assistant who points the analogy of being the square peg in the round hole, who, probably all unsuspectingly has most to fear in the successful passage of the Public Libraries Bill, and with this final hint we leave the subject.

St. Pancras and Public Libraries.—The spectacle of the St. Pancras Borough Council approaching the Local Government Board requesting permission to sell or otherwise dispose of the sites and premises secured for public library purposes, is a melancholy one for municipal librarians to contemplate. Our opinion that such a contemplated step is a grave error, is we fear, hardly likely to influence the St. Pancras authority, yet, consistent with our tenets as an Association, we must and do protest. We cannot witness such a blow at the Public Library cause with equanimity. We should like to see a local committee formed with the avowed object of educating public opinion on the point and the combating of the policy of the Borough Council.

The Forthcoming Annual Meeting.—Need we remind our readers that the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Association will be held in June at Nottingham? It is the special desire of the Council to give a completely national character to this meeting. The branches will be invited to send delegates officially, and it is hoped that the Library Authorities of the country will give facilities to members of their staffs to attend this important meeting. A programme of business which will interest all kinds of professional library workers will be arranged, and the Annual Business

Meeting will probably give rise also to matters of considerable interest. The date will be announced shortly; meanwhile we urge our members to decide to attend the meeting. Excursions will probably be run from London, and no doubt railway facilities can be obtained from other centres.

The Professional Examination.—We call attention in our advertisement pages to particulars of the Professional Examination in May, and take this opportunity of wishing success to all candidates who are members of the L.A.A.

THE THEORY OF BOOK SELECTION.*

By JAMES D. YOUNG, Greenwich Public Libraries.

Book selection is undoubtedly an art; one of the useful arts, I should be inclined to say, were it not for the fact that, as practised by a good many librarians, it seems to trench on the borders of the fine arts, the distinguishing characteristic of which is that they must be followed for their own sake, and with no ulterior motive. Now art for art's sake is all very well in the fine arts, but in the useful arts we must have a different guiding principle. A useful art is being successfully practised when the end which it is its function to bring about is clearly gained. Unless this end is brought about, the art is not being practised at all; it is being bungled. The difficulty very often is to say what is the end in view. At first sight it seems simple enough to say what is the object of the various useful arts we see practised around us. But really it is very often not at all a simple matter. Let us take just one example before coming to our own particular problem. The chief object of the essentially useful art of building seems to be the provision of shelter for man. But it is also a rent-producing investment, and it is just possible that there may be a conflict between the two objects in view, that of giving shelter to one part of mankind or of producing rent for another. Which is to be considered the principal object? I suppose there may be just a slight difference of opinion according to one's point of view.

Now what is the principal end we have in view when we set about buying books for public libraries? The answer to this question is desperately important, for upon it depends our whole mental bias when we come to undertake what is

*Paper read before a meeting of the Library Assistants' Association, at the Horniman Museum and Library, Forest Hill, S.E., on Wednesday, February 12th, 1913.

one of the most important tasks, if not *the* most important task, the librarian has to perform. And his mental bias will have an immensely powerful influence upon his practice, of that we may be sure. It may, however, just as well be admitted that not only would half-a-dozen different men give half-a-dozen different answers to our leading question, but that one man might give half-a-dozen different answers—and all of them quite sincere—at six different times, according to his mood.

Firstly, we must try and make our selection of books representative of the total literary output, always remembering, however, that the bulk of the public have a distinct predilection for certain definite kinds of books. This consideration will cause us to buy these books in rather larger quantities than at first sight appears desirable. Our next consideration is to see that we purchase for our libraries all that we can of the really important and valuable books—from an intellectual standpoint—which occasionally appear. These works make a very small percentage of the total literary output, and if we could only be sure of recognising them when they do appear, I think that all except the very small libraries could afford the bulk of them. The object here in view is to make the library a potential intellectual centre. The fact that the class of book we have now in mind is seldom read and little wanted by the public must not influence us in our choice. We must try and stock not only what the public wants, but what is good for the public whether it wants it or not. One other general rule may be laid down. In certain departments of literary activity, work which only requires to be done once is done over and over again. The number of text-books of French and Latin grammar, or of elementary histories of England which have been published, is highly creditable to the industry of those responsible for elementary education in England, but a nuisance to the bibliographer. It is sufficient for the librarian to see that on all such subjects he has a supply of books, which, while covering the subject adequately, also meets the demand. No library, outside the British Museum and a few special pedagogic libraries, can hope to have books really representative of the literature of school books.

Here we strike what seems to me to be a peculiarly difficult problem in the matter of book selection. Some librarians have tried to work out schemes of proportional representation in the different groups of literature. Such schemes are undoubtedly useful in a way, and may often act like a douche of cold common sense if a

librarian has the misfortune to be carried away by an intense preference for one or two subjects and buys an absurd number of books on these subjects. But that these schemes are really useful and are to be followed to any great extent does not seem likely upon mature reflection. For each group of literature demands separate treatment, and the general principles which would apply to one subject are useless when applied to another. For the sake of illustration let us consider two classes of literature and see in what different ways they must be dealt with.

There is no reason whatever why even the smallest libraries, working on a painfully small income, should not have a fair mathematical collection. Although the literature of the subject is enormous, the subject itself is not so very great. Even a fairly complete bibliography of mathematics probably does not exist, but this is no serious obstacle to the librarian, for many excellent selective bibliographies are in existence and easily obtainable. The whole subject, except in its most advanced aspects, has been written and rewritten again and again. The only problem is what books shall be chosen and what rejected? It does not matter if Todhunter's *Algebra* should be absent from the collection, provided that there is some other book in its place which covers the ground equally well. But in philosophy this system will not do at all. If we are going to have a philosophical collection, which is to be at all representative of the subject, then we must at least buy the most important works of *all* the philosophers who ever have lived and written. Here it is impossible to leave out Schopenhauer because you already have Hume, or discard Spencer in favour of Comte. In a small library the philosophical section would either be big in proportion to the total collection or else lamentably incomplete. In the same library the mathematical collection might very well be both small and relatively representative. But in a very large library the philosophical section, though fairly complete, might nevertheless be very small in comparison with the rest of the collection. I think therefore I am justified in saying, that any set of tables purporting to give the ideal proportions of one class of literature with another has very little practical value. There are sections of literature which must be relatively complete from the start, others must wait but are capable of infinite expansion.

Now we come to what is perhaps the most difficult problem of all. The total literary output is so great that most public libraries must be content with only a very small

percentage of all that is published. All sorts of books we should like to buy we must deny ourselves, but with regard to others we do not hesitate a minute, we buy them at once. What is more we buy certain classes of books pretty liberally, whilst ignoring other classes almost entirely. What are our reasons for favouring one class of literature and ignoring another? We know we constantly do so; can we justify our action?

It is worth noticing that at different periods of our history certain literary forms seem to flourish and attain a greater luxuriance than others. Undoubtedly the finest literature of the Elizabethan period was in the form of the drama. In the period which followed the drama still continued a vigorous existence, but other forms of poetry and philosophical speculation ousted it from its pre-eminent position. In the eighteenth century probably the essay would be most generally recognised as the most typical and successful kind of literature which marked that period. But if one were asked to name the most successful literary form of the present day the reply would undoubtedly be "the novel." Practically all the famous writers of the present day are novelists. This remark does not apply to England alone. The same may also be said of the Continent. It is novelists such as Tolstoy, Jokai and Anatole France who, in England, represent the literatures of Russia, Hungary and France. Consequently, whether it goes against the grain or not, the novel must be a specially favoured class of literature when we come to the task of modern book selection. This may not always be so although there are no very patent signs of change at present visible. Small signs do exist, however, that suggest the possibility of change in the future. Our fiction issues are going down. This may mean that the public are getting their fiction elsewhere, or that they are getting tired of this form of amusement—for to a great extent fiction is just a pastime—and seeking other and more amusing ways of spending their leisure. Should this ever be proved to be the case, then our theory must be modified to suit the changed conditions. This shows the impossibility of attempting to lay down any definite theory of book selection. Even the most general principles have only a temporary value and are susceptible of alteration at any time and may even have to be abandoned.

It is not possible for me to go into the question of local considerations very deeply. Of course it is obvious that two libraries in two different districts may cater for widely different classes of people. This will necessarily have a

considerable influence on the practical work of book selection. The manufacturing town will want books on the industries upon which it is engaged. But outside the departments of science and the useful arts, such considerations will not, or should not have, much effect. Where, however, there are large specialised libraries in existence, as in London, and some of the very large Provincial towns, it would seem advisable for the public library to limit itself where the other libraries are strong and to develop more particularly in other subjects. It is much better for libraries to be complementary to each other than to attempt competition.

Now let us look at the problem from another point of view. It is impossible to supply all the demands which the public make in the way of books, but some of the demands we must supply. Which are the demands we consider more important than others? Which are we going to give the preference to and which are we going to ignore? First of all it is impossible for the average public library to do the work which only highly specialised libraries, with a specially trained staff can undertake, with any hope of success. The practising lawyer, doctor or chemist, for the most part never think of using our public libraries for professional purposes, although, from experience, I know that they very often use them for their general reading. Nevertheless it seems to me desirable that on all such subjects as law, medicine, and chemistry (I am particularly thinking of applied chemistry, which has an enormous literature), we should be prepared to supply a fair number of books dealing with the subject generally. In fact I am inclined to lay down one general principle as follows:—On all definite branches of human mental activity the public library shall at least be prepared to supply as much literature of the subject as would be required by a student studying the subject at a University, or for professional purposes. That is the absolute minimum. On many subjects of course, such as literature, history, geography, philosophy, and sociology, we must have a literature far in advance of any such standard. Let us always remember, however, that the class we deal with, and for whom we must select the stock of our libraries is, in a particular sense, a middle class. The very advanced student or investigator exploring new fields of knowledge is far beyond us and outside of our assistance. The very ignorant or illiterate we can do little for, although some of us are very fond of trying to get this particular kind of leopard to change

his spots. But the normal citizen who has some interest in intellectual matters and the young student of all kinds and descriptions we must be prepared to satisfy at all points. We cannot give him a satisfactory law library, but we can and should give him a decent political and economic library. In fact the public library should be the library of the "complete citizen."

In avoiding the mistake of trying to compete with the highly specialised library, which is alone capable of supplying the needs of the very advanced student, we must not fall into the opposite error of attempting to cater for a class of people who have no aptitude for literary studies of any kind, and who are likely to find greater happiness and truer culture outside of libraries than in them. At the present time there is a huge output of practically worthless literature, whose object seems to be to bring all knowledge and culture down to the level of the meanest intellects. Browning is boiled down for the babes and Shakespeare for sucklings. Easy methods of learning everything under the sun are evolved, although strange to say the general standard of learning does not seem to be altered very much by all this activity. If publishers are to be believed every home may be turned into a university, and any man, woman, or child with a few hours to spare for reading each week can once more return to the ideal of the sixteenth and seventeenth century scholars and take all learning for their province. I think it is the peculiar duty of librarians to oppose this movement as much as they can. The great writers and thinkers have their own way of expressing whatever faith is within them. If their methods be faulty it is unfortunate, but such as their methods are they are the best known to us. The methods of the study can never be brought to the market place unless someone like Socrates chooses to do it for us, and Socrates represents a very rare type indeed. Therefore, though the crude knowledge which our great intellectuals have prepared for us looks strong stuff to be served to the mere ordinary mortal, we must remember that there is no virtue in any "popular" substitute for it. Intellectual quackery is certainly one of the evils of the day. In his selection of books the librarian can at least refuse to assist in its propagation, and thus do something definite to justify his existence.

I remember once on entering a large and well-known public library one of the first things I saw in the lending department was a notice calling the attention of the borrowers to lists of books on what were termed "Questions

of the day." On inspection I found that the questions of that particular day were an insignificant war in an out-of-the-way part of the world, a new system of Japanese physical training, and a political matter of no great interest. The books on these subjects were all fairly new, that is to say, none of them had stood the test of time, and they were on subjects of purely ephemeral interest, therefore they were hastily, and in all probability, badly written. The practical result of this sort of thing is that a librarian calls the attention of his readers to a fair number of the worst books in his library. There is another and worse aspect. In order to have a constant supply of new books on the "questions of the day" a librarian is likely to be induced to purchase over liberally in modern up-to-date books whose ultimate fate should be the pulping-machine. It is likely to give an unfortunate bias to his selection. Personally, I like to think of the library as a serene sort of place, not too much upset by the latest nine-days' wonder, but rather dealing with the eternal verities and problems of existence.

One other matter only do I propose to deal with as being likely to influence us in feeling our way towards those general principles upon which a theory of book selection may be based. In view of the fact that only a very small percentage of the total literary output can ever find its way into our libraries, the idea which is most constantly with us is that of making a small, and as near as possible representative selection of every class of book. This is a good enough general rule, but like every other rule it is subject to modification. There are plenty of histories of Germany to be had, therefore the rule is select. But as far as I know there is but one history of Prussia in the English language. Here there is no problem of selection. Whether the one book in the English language is good, bad, or indifferent, it is just as well to have it. Now there are quite a large number of subjects, which are of fair general interest too, upon which there is a great paucity of literature. The present war in the Balkans called my attention to the fact that whilst there were in English quite a large number of books on Servia, there were only a few books on Montenegro, and practically none at all on Bulgaria and Roumania. A consideration of the problem presented by these observations leads me to think that here the really wide-awake librarian has a chance of doing excellent work. On all the subjects which are overwritten, and most subjects are overwritten, he must exercise a severe censorship. He can afford to pick and choose, but the subjects which have a very

small literature must be watched carefully and whatever can be had on them procured. He must nurse them as a parliamentary candidate nurses a constituency, in the sure hope that some day his labour will be repaid.

In conclusion, I must try once more to show how difficult it is to lay down any general principles which would be likely to help in the practical work of book selection. A different set of principles could very well be laid down for every different section of literature. In dealing with the different sections, such a huge number of special problems crop up and clamour for particular consideration and treatment that it almost appears as though, even if general guiding principles could be enunciated, they would be of very little use to librarians. And it must also be remembered that once the general conception of a "philosophy of book selection," to use Mr. Brown's happy phrase, has been grasped, the practical work depends more on natural aptitude than upon special training. Still it is surely not a waste of time to face the difficulties which our work presents to us and try and find even a partial solution to them.

PRACTICAL BOOK SELECTION.*

By **GEORGE R. BOLTON**, Hon. Assistant Editor of *The Library Assistant*, Stoke Newington Public Library.

Of late, so many have been the expressed objections of certain members to the supposed dryness and sameness of the papers read before these meetings, that I purpose to-night to speak to you out of my own experience alone, and not from text-books, so as to avoid, if at all possible, reiteration of information, with which those members assure us they are already profoundly familiar. Those to whom I have referred, however, must not expect that I shall offer something which shall excite their emotions to the heights of which a dance, a social, or a whist drive is capable. I do think, however, there are a few things one meets with which do not find themselves the subject of treatment in a book or pamphlet, which may possess something of novelty, and perhaps of interest.

Book selection may be treated under two distinct headings; that for the newly established library, and that for the institution already in existence. For the new library

*Paper read before a meeting of the Library Assistants' Association, at the Horniman Museum and Library, Forest Hill, S.E., on Wednesday, February 12th, 1913.

the librarian's work is simplified to a large extent by the works of Nelson, Sonnenschein, and others, whose aim it is to present in classified order the best and most representative books on all known subjects in the world's literature. When once a library has built up its main collection it then has to proceed along similar lines in book selection to the library which has been established some time.

However much we theorize, in actual practice we have to bow to the powers that be, who often upset all our theories upon how books should be chosen. Much has been said, and much more will be said, no doubt, as to the value of the advice to be secured from experts in their subjects. In practice the expert is a little disappointing. I do not suggest that the science-master or the teacher in mathematics is unequal to the task of pronouncing an opinion upon a book if he knows of it, and has had time to examine it: but the majority of these people have not the time, and their outlook is almost invariably confined to the narrow limits of the text-book to which they pin all their faith. Experts, too, are generally inclined to take too high a view of the capacities of the general reader, and very often reject a useful "general knowledge" book in favour of a highly specialized and expensive treatise, frequently useless to the people for whom it is intended.

The average committee member often prevents the selection of those books usually most required. Practical book selection for the thoroughly "live" and up-to-date public library is one based upon constant and frequent demand, and with this demand the committee man is obviously out of touch, as compared with the librarian. What often happens to recommendations submitted to the committee? Take the case of recently published and expensive books. Such are often thrown out because they *are* expensive and for no other reason, while money is spent on cheaper books, the purchase of which could be postponed. The recommendation is that the book be purchased when cheaper; but such a decision will prevent an important addition when it is most desirable.

It is frequently difficult for the librarian to give adequate and detailed reasons for the purchase of the books he recommends. I do not suggest that anyone can memorize sufficient facts except about a few books, but for practical purposes every information must be ready at hand for instant reference. Quite recently I knew of a case in which the works of a certain important writer were recommended for purchase and rejected because none of the committee

were acquainted with the writer. Nor was their officer able to persuade them as to the importance of it. That work is lost to the library for the present at any rate, and one may well ask how such a mistake can be avoided in future. It is suggested that where a like recommendation is to be submitted, a short annotation should accompany the usual particulars, so that the committee may be better qualified to pass judgment.

In practical book selection one has to treat with caution the well meaning person keenly interested in a certain period of literature, or a certain author whose every written word he asserts the library should possess. If that person is influential locally, or is a member of your committee, then still greater care has to be used. Let me give you an instance. During 1908 there was published a book by Jean Finot entitled *Le préjugé des races*. The work deals with an aspect of the feminist movement, and is considered by some to be an important contribution to the subject. I know a library which has bought that book, not upon the recommendation of its librarian, but upon that received from someone who would be included in the category of people I have mentioned. I submit this is not practical book selection. The thing to have done would have been to wait until a translation appeared so that the book might have a wider circulation. If any library had bought Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* in the original and not waited for the translation which followed almost immediately, such an one is proceeding to select books upon wrong lines.

Nothing is more unfortunate than that a library should be filled up with such books as the *English Plutarch*, merely because it is a product of its time, especially as the bulk of the information is to be obtained from the *Dictionary of National Biography* and similar reference books. Neither is it necessary that a library should possess everything known to have been published by a particular author. That a library should be truly representative of the best of that author I grant, but everything a writer publishes is not necessarily good and only a selection is required. And there is another side to this question. An author's one work is sometimes published under the guise of different titles at varying periods, and care has to be taken lest the library finds itself stocked with unnecessary copies of a certain book. The late Andrew Lang is an example in point. One of his books, the *Tales of the Greek Seas* was included in the *Tales of Troy and Greece*, published several years ago, but is now being issued separately. R. L. Stevenson affords

another example, a recent issue of his *Poems* being but an edition of his *Ballads*, *Underwoods* and *Songs of Travel* in collected form, all of which were issued separately, and probably are in most libraries in that form.

It is not enough that books should be chosen as there is a demand for them, but the library should anticipate the demand. Public libraries are not so safely disposed in public opinion that they can afford to ignore the reasonable requests of their readers, and it therefore devolves upon them to see that they are representative of current thought and opinion. No matter whether your committee or librarian disagrees with a certain Act of Parliament more or less before the public mind at the present time: it is the function of the public library to provide a book or books which attempt to give some explanation, if possible, of its working. Recently the President of the Royal Society made an announcement with regard to the origin of life, and drew from religionists and others, exclamations akin to horror that their pre-conceived ideas should be assailed. That address is now in pamphlet form, and every public library should possess a copy. For the last month or two we have been hearing a great deal about the Montessori System of Education, and the subject appears important enough to be represented by The Board of Education Pamphlet, No. 24, and Smith's *Montessori System*. The first might be allocated to the reference department; the second to the lending, so that a new subject is always represented in the library at any time, which is rather important. The arrangement by which certain books can be obtained without waiting for the committee's sanction is worthy of more universal practice. This is generally provided for by a resolution of the committee empowering the librarian, alone or in consultation with his Chairman, to purchase certain books which it is considered important the library should have as soon as they are issued.

There is still a little too much said about the "best" book; and so many subjects are unrepresented in a library on the pretence that the best treatise has not yet been published. Forgive me if I weary you when I refer to the discussion which raged some time ago with reference to certain dictionaries of authors' works published by Routledge. The critics decided in their own minds that these were by no means perfect, and certainly were not the "best." But I have lived to find these so-called imperfect dictionaries very useful indeed, and shall continue to do so until better are published. Libraries must be more inclined

to select the best of the published books on a subject, and not reject a work because it is not the best, particularly when there is nothing else to represent the subject, as is often the case.

It is perhaps a little elementary to remind you that in submitting recommendations to a committee the books are best listed in classified order. I would further suggest that it is better to deal with a class or two at a time, as convenient. This of course will be decided by the number of books you are selecting. But if anything from £20 worth are being submitted then it is much better for the committee to deal with one or two classes than a complete range of subjects. In practice, too, it is very much better to consider reference and lending books apart, although nothing I have suggested would prevent an important book being listed outside the classes for the particular meeting. I am not in a position to speak as to the general practice, but I wonder how many libraries give at least two columns for prices on their recommendations list: the first to show the published price, and the second the net price, which would include deduction of discount on "subject" books, and reduction on secondhand? There are some who disagree with this practice I have no doubt, but there seems everything in favour of it. What use is there in submitting a book, published price twenty-five shillings, when you know that a secondhand bookseller is offering it at ten? Of course, some librarians might not wish to tell their committee the actual price at which the book can be secured, but quote the published price in each case with the proviso that it is possible the book may be obtained cheaper. The average committee man is not so easily convinced, however, and it is a long way to securing a book if it can be shown that the volume is purchasable at a good reduction, whatever the net cost ultimately is.

One of the most useful aids to practical selection is to arrange with your bookseller to submit books on approval, so that the committee can examine them. This can be arranged for quite easily at perhaps a little extra cost, and is a point worth consideration. It will be found that this privilege will not only be offered by local men, but big firms of secondhand booksellers will be quite willing to supply books on approval or return. Where, however, a library does purchase its new books locally, it will be found that the arrangement to submit them on approval or return will increase the cost, as a local bookseller cannot afford specially to obtain books for approval at the risk of no sale.

Queer as it may seem, some librarians are well satisfied with their work if they can say at the end of the year that all the books in the reference library have been purchased at such an average price, as also the lending books. To select books with a view to keeping to a pre-determined average cost, seems to be their aim rather than selecting books because they are needed.

To select a whole series of books because they belong to a series is not necessarily good policy. A whole series is invariably not all good, probably only partly so, and the same method of selection should apply to series of books as to those volumes published independently of each other. Another valuable help to book selection is an intimate study of secondhand catalogues carried out regularly and systematically, and I would suggest that at least every senior assistant should have the opportunity to devote part of his time to a careful examination of booksellers' catalogues as received. If it is not possible to secure the opportunity in library hours, then any assistant will well repay the time spent if he carries out this duty in his own leisure. The perusal of secondhand catalogues is one of the best methods of acquiring an intimate working knowledge of the current market prices of books, while as an aid to the knowledge of the different editions and other bibliographical data the idea is invaluable to practical selection, particularly to the building up of a truly comprehensive reference library. Like the crude and slipshod manner in which books are herded together in many a bookseller's shop, the method by which books are arranged in the various booksellers' catalogues is open to much improvement, and the work of perusing these lists would be considerably facilitated if the books were properly listed. It only shows that many people may possess a knowledge of books and yet lack all the business acumen required to present them most favourably to those interested.

Publishers' "remainder" lists form an excellent medium for obtaining useful books at cheap rates, and are worth the librarian's close attention. For the benefit of the uninformed, perhaps you will permit me to define the term "remainder." It is applied to those copies remaining unsold out of an edition, especially after the demand for the book has fallen off or ceased, and frequently disposed of at a reduced price. It does not follow that because no market exists for certain books they are rubbish, the reason often is that such books appeal only to a select circle of purchasers, and once that circle is supplied the demand for the book ceases. But this is often the library's opportunity to secure a valuable work

at a greatly reduced price. In support of this view we mention Lean's *Collections of Proverbs, etc.*, published in five volumes at £5 5s. net., and offered after a few years as a publisher's remainder at £1 10s. The second series of *The Library* published at 2s. 6d. a number, has also appeared as a remainder at 4d. a copy, and many of the parts are now quite scarce. Black's colour books, published at 20s. net., are another example, while many instances could be quoted where books once in the remainder list are now only obtainable at greatly enhanced and somewhat fancy prices.

The conditions which govern our work make the dependence on the review almost essential, although it is by no means the best method of book selection. Librarians, however, could certainly not dispense with the analytic and searching reviews which appear in the numerous scientific and other journals, while in respect of fiction, "The Times Literary Supplement," "The Athenæum," and "Punch," are useful, amongst others. As regards the last paper, it generally contains notices of two or three fiction works only, but these generally afford a useful guide. Reviews of fiction very often omit to mention the very factor which would mean the rejection of a book, and it is often better to ignore new authors if the notices of their books suggest any tendency towards the discussion of unwholesome subjects. Out of this question of course arises another, namely, how far a committee, or its officer, should act the rôle of censor, on opinions or ideas political, religious, and otherwise. A selection which prevents the purchase of any book unnecessarily nasty is a wise one, and library authorities are exercising their legitimate powers by excluding books issued as types of the so-called modern school of thought, but which in reality are wordy narratives of a side of life, which if it exists at all, is better left unrecorded—in the pages of a novel at any rate. One must be able to distinguish between the real and the unreal in any age, and to remark those books which truly represent current thought, or which are important in the history of literature. To follow the example of the Doncaster authorities who decided to withdraw *Tom Jones* is an instance of a committee's inexcusable ignorance of the importance of this great work.

When all is said and done there is probably no better way of choosing books than by personal inspection, to be carried out at certain defined centres established in a few of the principal towns of the country. The exhibitions of new books which used to be held at the Annual Conferences

of the Library Association are a step in the direction indicated, but this is not enough. An extension of the practice is required, and a kind of clearing house established to which all publishers would send their publications, and at which librarians could regularly and periodically make their selection. One objection to the exhibitions held by some firms of booksellers is that many of the books offered at much reduced prices are quite out of date, and there is a danger of the inexperienced librarian being induced by the large number of apparently new books on show to purchase books superseded by more recent works. There is of course the other side to this: such an exhibition of admittedly out-of-date books may afford an opportunity for a newly established library to acquire a few standard books at a cheap rate.

My paper is an incomplete record of actual experience in book selection. There will be numerous points I have not dealt with, but it has not been my intention to provide a treatise on practical book selection in tabloid form, but rather to enumerate a few things that really happen in practice, as against those which are supposed to, in theory. I am afraid it will appear that I have been theorizing a good deal, but this is really not the case. Where I suggest a certain line of action in the manner of a theory, that suggestion has already been practised and found of considerable service.

PROCEEDINGS.

MARCH GENERAL MEETING.

The March Meeting of the Eighteenth Session was held at the Chambers of the Library Association, 24 Bloomsbury Square, W.C., on Wednesday, March 12th, at 8 p.m.

As previously announced in *The Assistant*, Mr. Cedric Chivers was unable to fulfil his promise, on account of business calling him to America, to lecture to the Association on Modern Library Binding, which was to have been illustrated with lantern views. Under the circumstances the Association is indebted to the President, Mr. H. T. COUTTS, for kindly volunteering to fill the breach at short notice. There was a small attendance when Mr. W. C. Berwick Sayers, on taking the chair explained the reason for the change of plans. Mr. Coutts then read his paper on "MODERN LIBRARY BINDING," which we hope will appear in an early issue of *The Library Assistant*.

The resultant discussion was opened by Mr. H. G. HAYNE (Hornsey), who pleaded for a co-operative Public Library Bindery. He thought that corners and edges of bindings wore out quicker than they should, and showed the necessity for some measure of reinforcing. Mr. C. H. R. PEACH (Gray's Inn) spoke of his experience of cloth as being durable when not subjected to much wear. He had also experimented with paraffin wax and linseed oil as a preservative. Mr. LUXMORE NEWCOMBE (University College) also spoke of paraffin wax as a preservative. Of late years he had used veterinary vaseline, which had

proved successful. Mr. W. G. CHAMBERS (Woolwich) said the possibility of buying second-hand novels at a cheap rate had, he thought, revolutionized the whole question, as it was possible to replace instead of re-binding fiction, especially as the dirty book was such an important factor. He had made experiments with flexible glue, which he thought far preferable to the ordinary glue, and reduced strain. Where maps and plates were such a predominant feature in a book that mounting with Jaconet made for undue bulkiness he advocated guarding with a narrow strip at the fold. Mr. A. M. MOSLIN (Stepney) said that the experience in his library resulted in the abandoning of the tight back and the adoption of the open back. Mr. F. E. SANDRY (Canning Town) said his objection to the cheap book was not merely because it *was* cheap, but so often it was both cheap and nasty. He did not agree that second-hand replacements solved the difficulty, as so many of these second-hand books required rebinding at once. Mr. R. WRIGHT (Royal Societies' Club) voiced the opinion that fiction re-binding was a difficult problem on account of the dirty book. He was of opinion that covers were, as a rule, too heavy for the book, and advocated the substitution of a limp board to minimise weight. He thought vaseline was equal to any thing else as a preservative. Mr. H. G. SURETIES (Hornsey) agreed with Mr. Chambers that there was much to be said for the principle of buying second-hand replacements to minimise the binding expense. His experience was that second-hand replacements solved the difficulty of the dirty book. The Chairman, Mr. W. C. BERWICK SAYERS (Croydon), in the course of moving a vote of thanks to Mr. Coutts, opposed the practice of placing location numbers at the foot of books, as that was the place which received most handling. He advocated the use of runners to extra heavy volumes as helping to minimise wear and tear. For the mounting of maps and plates, his experience proved that very fine silk was of advantage in preventing bulkiness. Miss BLACKWELL (Chelsea) seconded the vote of thanks, and in reply, Mr. COUTTS agreed that Co-operative Public Library binding was desirable but impracticable. Vellum was probably the best for corners, and pigskin was a good leather when the book was heavy and received a fair amount of grease from usage. Vaseline was a good preservative. Experiments had been made with flexible glue in England and America; it had proved to be efficacious in the matter of book repairing.

MIDLAND BRANCH ANNUAL MEETING.

On Wednesday, February 12th, 1913, the Midland Branch held their THIRD ANNUAL MEETING in Birmingham, the gathering proving in every way a highly successful one. In the afternoon members assembled at the Central Public Library, where Mr. H. W. CHECKETTS, Chairman of the Branch, gave an interesting and entertaining talk on the Brussels and Paris Easter Schools of the L.A.A. For the evening meeting the party adjourned to the Library of the Birmingham Law Society, where they were met by Mr. A. H. Coley, the Society's President. After the usual preliminary business and the election of new members to the Branch, the Annual Report of the Committee and the Financial Statement for 1912 were presented by the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer respectively and adopted unanimously. It was resolved that the Hon. Secretary be instructed to write to Messrs. E. A. Peppiette and W. Pollitt, congratulating them on their recent promotions. The question of the Public Libraries Bill was discussed, and it was resolved that letters be written to Members of Parliament representing the Midland Branch area, requesting their support for that measure.

The Chairman then announced that the following Officers and Committee for 1913 had been elected without contest: CHAIRMAN, Mr. H. Grindle; HONORARY TREASURER, Mr. H. Woodbine; HONORARY SECRETARY, Mr. F. J. Patrick; COMMITTEE, Messrs. H. W. Checketts, M. C. Hunt and R. H. Newey. In an apt speech, Mr. Checketts welcomed Mr. Grindle to

the chair, which was then taken by the latter gentleman, amidst hearty applause. On the motion of Mr. Owen, seconded by Mr. Taylor, Mr. H. Dixon was then elected to the vacancy on the Committee. Mr. Owen then proposed a very hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Checketts for the excellent service rendered by him as Chairman of the Branch since its inauguration, and to the Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary for their services during 1912, which was carried unanimously, and to which the gentlemen concerned briefly replied. It was then decided that Mr. Walter Powell, Chief Librarian Birmingham Public Libraries, be invited to accept the Hon. Presidency of the Branch, and that the Committee be instructed to consider and report on the question of electing Honorary Vice-Presidents of the Branch.

Mr. W. Ewart Owen then read his paper on "THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW," which it is hoped will appear in a later issue of *The Library Assistant*.

An interesting discussion followed, in which almost all present took part, and to which Mr. COLEY contributed some very interesting and sympathetic remarks. The proceedings terminated with hearty votes of thanks to Mr. Owen for his paper; to the President and Council of the Birmingham Law Society, and to Mr. Walter Powell, Chief Librarian, Birmingham, for their kindness in providing accommodation for the meeting.

The Annual Report and Financial Statement of the Midland Branch are unavoidably held over on account of lack of space.

CORRESPONDENCE.

REGISTRATION.

DEAR SIR, *To the Editor of "The Library Assistant."*

Within a short time the Registration question will again occupy the attention of the Council of the Library Association. A large number of assistants who are working for the Diploma are opposed to the granting of Fellowships to assistants and librarians (other than chief librarians) who have not obtained the Diploma. To remedy this a protest has been organised, and the majority of the more important libraries have already received copies of the protest through their Chief Librarians. It will be impossible, however, to get into touch with every assistant holding L.A. certificates, and we shall be glad to forward a copy to any assistant, who so far has not been given an opportunity to express his opinion.

Central Library,

Leeds,

21st February, 1913.

[Since this letter was received the Library Association Council has received the protest mentioned, and, after an exhaustive enquiry by its Provincial members, has resolved that the demand for fellowship is exaggerated. It therefore adheres to its present position in the matter.—Ed.]

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM POLLITT (Leeds).

NORMAN TRELIVING (Leeds).

F. W. C. PEPPER (Bolton).

NEW MEMBERS.

Members: W. B. Coupland, Blackburn. C. F. Davis and C. R. Gladdis, Southampton. Miss Edith Jansen, Bibliothekarinnenschule, Berlin; and F. P. Kildman, Leyton.

Associates: P. W. Bennett and L. J. Turner, Croydon. The Misses Chapman and R. Miller, Deptford. The Misses F. Corby, F. Goodale, V. W. Starling, A. Webb and P. Webb, all of Leyton. R. F. Kennedy, Plumstead, and G. Gregory, Woolwich.

Irish Branch. Associates: J. Fitzsimmons and W. Lauder, Belfast.

South Coast Branch. Associates: The Misses Q. Betts and M. Rosamond, Eastbourne, and E. M. Osborne, Brighton.

APPOINTMENTS AND CHANGES.

CORTHESEY, J., of the London Library, has been appointed Librarian of the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

GARNER, PERCY A., of Bishopgate Institute, has been appointed an Assistant in the Birmingham Public Libraries.